Summer 2015

THE LONG JOURNEY HOME: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF BHUTANESE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

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An Essay Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts & Sciences of
John Carroll University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Masters of Arts

By
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2015

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PREFACE

In April 2015, I travelled to Kathmandu and Damak, Nepal, with a colleague to learn about the Bhutanese refugee[1] population. We were guests of the International Office of Migration (IOM) and were granted access to interview the staff and visit the Transit Center, the Beldangi refugee camps, the IOM compound and facilities where processing and classes take place. This was a rare opportunity considering normally only IOM employees, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) employees, and visiting dignitaries are granted such access. Before going to the camps I consulted with John Carroll University's Institutional Review Board to verify that I did not need approval for the research trip. Ms. Thornton confirmed that I would not need approval to gather data in an informal conversation regarding the oral history of the refugees. Everyone discussed in this essay did gave oral consent and was aware that I was writing my Master's essay on the content I learned.

My colleague and I, as two guests from Cleveland, attempted to learn as much as possible about how this group initially became refugees. We were also interested in the beginning process of resettlement, since our perspective comes from the other side of the world. It is difficult to determine an exact number of immigrants and refugees in any city, but in 2014, Ohio welcomed 1,248 Bhutanese refugees, accounting for almost half of the total number of refugees resettled in the state last year. Cleveland and Akron, Ohio, have a particularly large population of Bhutanese refugees. They are attracting secondary migration into the area.

[1]"The UN in 1951, in its Article 1, defines a refugee as a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (Kharat 287).

In order to become more welcoming to our newly arrived neighbors, we must first learn about their plight of fleeing Bhutan, living more than 15 years in a refugee camp in Nepal, and finally their transition to Cleveland. By understanding their history and the tremendous will to endure all those years of waiting to call somewhere home, we can better support them here in the United States of America. My degree in humanities has acquainted me with what it means to be human, but has also made me aware of one's responsibilities to other humans. The theoretical study of the humanities should lead to praxis, to practical application of knowledge to improve the lives of others. My career and studies have taught me that in order to help, in any way, one must first understand the struggle to begin to undo the pain and suffering that too many endure.

"*Refugees are not born, but created, by states, individuals and groups"*[2]

In this essay I will examine the history of the Bhutanese refugees and my experience in the Nepalese camps in order to better understand the refugee resettlement process. This will demonstrate how their history and transitional period shape their ability to successfully assimilate into American culture. By reviewing the history of how this group became refugees and briefly summarizing the resettlement process, one will better understand the level of preparation and resources available to a refugee before arriving in the United States. Their history as a people marginalized, discriminated against, and eventually forced to flee Bhutan unites this ethnic group in a search for resettlement in a country where they can maintain their culture and faith.

Multiple interviews in this essay will reveal what life is like in the refugee camp and help the reader understand the conditions in which they are educated and prepared for transitioning to life in the United States. Synopses of the Cultural Orientation classes taught in Nepal will detail the lessons this fairly sheltered and secluded population have before they are resettled. After providing a better understanding of the overall initial process, this essay will further explore what agencies aid them once they arrive in America during this difficult time of transition. Theses combined factors (history, resettlement process, and cultural orientation/preparation) all need to be thoroughly examined in order to understand how these experiences will affect this group's ability to assimilate into American culture.

[2] Sadako Ogata, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees (Ikram 2005, 101)

GANGA DIYALI

I serve professionally on the Refugee Services Collaborative, a non-profit organization that works to assist refugees in Cleveland. To better serve in this role and to utilize my education, I undertook the task of learning more about my city's largest refugee population. I began by meeting with a former Bhutanese refugee, Ganga Diyali, who was president of his own non-profit in Cleveland. Ganga Diyali recently became a United States citizen, and although he technically did not denounce his original citizenship—he had none, he was stateless—he still proudly refers to himself as a Nepali Bhutanese American. Diyali told an abbreviated history of the conflict and his own story with a smile. His story included recounting the human rights violations his family endured, years of struggles inside a refugee camp, and the difficult transition to American life. When I asked, not knowing which was politically correct, whether he was Bhutanese or Nepalese, he told me he is a Bhutanese who came from Nepal.[3]

His family fled when he was four, so he cannot remember Bhutan and regrets never being able to return to the land where he was born. After his family fled from southern Bhutan to Nepal, they lived in a refugee camp for the next 18 years. They lived in the refugee camp Sansichare, also known as the Pathri Camp, now the smallest of the last three remaining camps. There are millions of similar refugee youths born in camps who have never even been to the country that persecuted their parents. The older generations of refugees still hold out hope to someday return to their homeland. The children born into this life are simply and sadly forever marked as refugees unwanted in their homelands and growing up in a camp unsure of their futures.

[3] Phenotypically there is no one trait that distinguishes a Nepali from a Bhutanese or Indian. The countries have many ethnicities but similar origins, resulting in common features.

Diyali came from the intersection of three impoverished and underdeveloped countries, none of which welcome his people's residency or recognize them as fellow citizens. When he told me this part of the story, I was confused and asked, "How could you miss the land that systematically coerced your people to leave? The same land that refused to welcome you home, and instead isolated your suffering to a corner in a forest" Diyali smiled and said he was not explaining it right and started again. Maybe my point of view prevented me from comprehending this strong sense of nationalism after almost two decades of being isolated and refused reintegration. Cleveland is not only half a world away from where Diyali came from, but also a faraway culture with few lifestyle similarities.

I still did not get the allure or possible nostalgia, but I was heading to Nepal soon and thought maybe it was one of those "have to see it to believe it" facts of life. My next question to Diyali in the interview was, "What did your family do for 18 years in the camp?" According to YouTube videos online of the camps, they appeared to be similar to small bamboo villages filled with people sitting and waiting despairingly (Sharma). Diyali spoke fondly of the schools run by the Caritas Foundation that provided education in the camps. Grades kindergarten through ten are in one school, and there is a separate high school. Both are within walking distance of the camp's housing.[4] All subjects and administration are conducted in English except the Nepali language class; this explains

[4] A 2003 study revealed that, "The majority of Bhutanese refugees are children below 17 years old which is the school going age, and they do go to schools run by UNHCR. According to UNHCR electronic data, the refugee population constitutes more than 45 percent children of which 12 per cent are below the age of four (UNHCR 2000)." (Kharat 2003, 287)

Diyali's impressive English. He informed me that he received a good education and loved school in Nepal. He said people do leave high school to go to college on scholarships and come back to help fellow refugees in the camps.[5]

His father worked as a day laborer for 12 hours a day and make roughly $.50 USD. That was considered worth laboring in the heat in unsafe illegal conditions. After this conversation I researched whether or not his father's experience was an outlier in this community. I discovered, "Although employment of refugees is not permitted in Nepal, many Bhutanese refugees scattered all over Nepal and within UNHCR camps are working just to survive. Since they are ready to work at cheaper rates than local Nepali workers landowners prefer to employ them in their fields" (Kharat 2003, 286). I asked Diyali, "What did he need money so badly for? Are there even places to shop or buy things in the camp?" At this time I was relying on my preconceived notions from the YouTube videos of the camp (Sharma). In the videos, the houses are all bamboo huts with thatch roofs, no electricity, and no running water, with nowhere to go but to the next hut. Diyali told me those who could work as illegal cheap labor used it to supplement their food source. The World Food Programme's food ration for his family for 15 days was: 10 lbs. of rice, 2 lbs. of potatoes,

Figure 1 Example of typical housing in the Beldangi refugee camp

[5] "Teachers, health workers and food distributors as well as those maintaining the water supply system and other services in the camps are refugees themselves." (Kharat 2003, 288)

1 lb. of daal (lentils), and small amounts of sugar, salt, oil, and cabbage. He told me if they wanted to eat fresh meat, fruit, or other vegetables, they had to work illegally for whatever little money they could get.

Now Diyali serves as a quasi-ambassador for the land that refused to welcome him. He is a pastor in the Nepali Samdan Church in Lakewood, Ohio, publishes a newspaper in Nepalese, and speaks to groups about what it was like growing up in a refugee camp (Diyali). His modern-day rags to "riches" (being the first in his family's history to own his own home or car) is truly inspiring and made me feel painfully aware how fortunate my own upbringing was and how many children grow up so differently. After speaking with him, I followed him to the Sunday service at his church to see if it was traditional or influenced by American Christianity. The Samdan Church was a living room church for four years and finally moved into a Lutheran church willing to rent its space during "off hours" on Sundays ("A Church to Call Home").

The service itself was foreign and like none other that I have attended. There was a full band on stage that performed and sang hymns as the congregation stood and waved their arms, praised with their eyes closed, and sang at full volume. It was powerful and intoxicating even though I did not understand a word. Nepal is less than 10% Christian, but those who have converted are very intense in their faith. In many ways Diyali's and the other members of the congregation's lives have changed; they have "Americanized" and now live a life that they had never dreamed of. In other ways, he is still very much true to his heritage and lives like many refugees, blending the old with the new. He told me his biggest fear was not being able to maintain his culture when he came to America.

Diyali is simply one of several refugees in the camp who have lived through similar times and became American citizens. So few know their stories and struggle.

REFUGEE TO CITIZEN

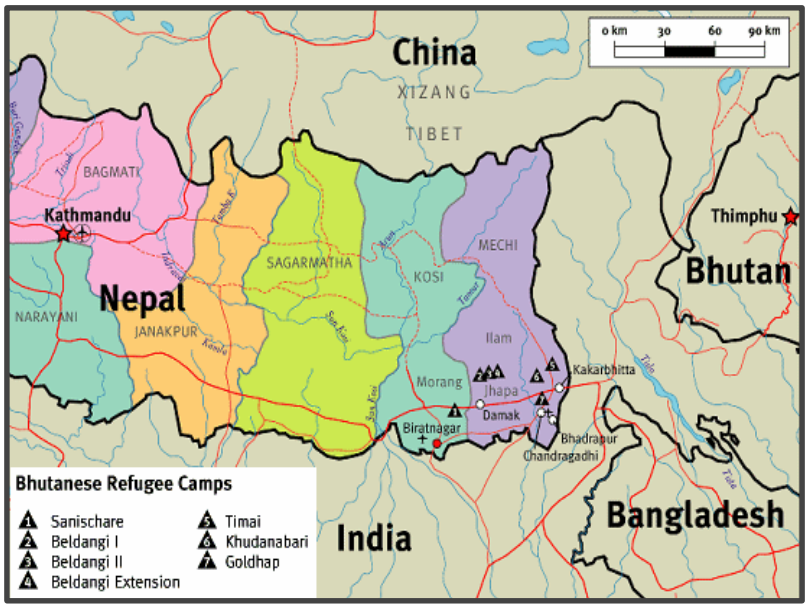

Figure 2 Map of refugee camps location in Nepal

While listening to Diyali's interview answers, the fact that he was just one of over a hundred thousand gees that fled Bhutan into India and then to camps in Nepal did not escape me (Ikram 2005, 107).Their delays are painfully long, and last decades while the international community finds a new sustainable and safe home to relocate refugees to. This section gives a brief history of how a group of people migrated and thrived in Bhutan but then were exiled and nationless, only to struggle to gain American citizenship. Once they arrive in America their search for reintegration is far from over. As the interview with Diyali and the others in this essay show, the wait and struggle to find a home is not a quick or easy process. Few Americans know the plight of the more than 120,000 that dates back generations and continues to this day (Ikram 2005, 107).

Their presence is growing and they are forming new communities across America. In Northeast Ohio the main concentrations of Bhutanese refugees are

Lakewood, Cleveland Heights, Parma, and the far west side of Cleveland. If we hope to welcome good people like Diyali into our cities and hearts, we must first understand their culture and history.

REFUGEE TO CITIZEN: THE "L-WORD"—A BRIEF HISTORY

Diyali's family, like the majority of the other refugees, are part of the Lhotshampa ethnic group, also known as the borderland people of Bhutan. The ethnic group speaks Nepalese, largely practices Hinduism, and has populated and worked in the south of Bhutan since the 19th century. They (including some Indian nationals) settled along the border of India and Bhutan between 1865 and 1930, encouraged to farm uncultivated lands by the Bhutanese government (Hutt 2003, 24; Evans 2013, 26). During a period of relative peace, the Kingdom of Bhutan granted the Lhotshampas blanket citizenship in 1958, though employment and marriage discrimination continued in the kingdom (Eli 2008). The Lhotshampa were discriminated against by Bhutan's ruling class for decades before the final exodus.

The layers of nationality and ethnicity must be explained in order to understand the complexity of the systematic oppression and exile of one group of people. The promotion of this homogeneous national identity in Bhutan led to a generations-old population becoming denaturalized and stripped of rights. Bhutan existed without cohesion or as a nation state for centuries before a common culture formed in the 17th century (Evans 2013, 26). Over subsequent centuries, Bhutan's current borders formed as a hereditary monarch ruled. The country has several dialects but has always traditionally practiced a Tibetan form of Mahayana Buddhism throughout. According to the scholar Rosalind

Evans from Oxford University, the southern-dwelling Lhotshampas, sometimes referred to as Nepali Bhutanese, include

> peoples from a range of different ethnic and linguistic background's whose ancestors migrated from Nepal itself or from the Nepali-speaking part of Darjeeling in West Bengal a few generations ago. The Lhotshampas are predominantly Hindu and some belong to caste groups, such as Brahmins, Chhetris and Dalits. Additionally, and as in the Nepali society from which they originate, there are other ethnic groups represented amongst the southern Bhutanese such as Rais, Limbus, Gurungs, and Tamangs, some of whom practise Buddhism. Despite these differences, "in Bhutan we were all stuck together and we called ourselves Nepali-speaking Bhutanese people" (Evans 2013, 27).

To begin to understand the change in policy that led the people to flee, here is a concise account of the end of the era of Lhotshampas in Bhutan:

> In the 1980s, illegal immigration re-emerged as a political issue and King Jigme Singye Wangchuk's desire to maintain a Bhutanese cultural identity based around "one culture, one people" led to the 1985 Citizenship Act. The policy promoted the ruling class's language and religion—Lamaistic Buddhism—favouring the Ngalong Drukpa ethnic group. The law put a ban on the Nepalese language, required a traditional form of dress, restricted the practice of Hinduism, and even placed hairdo limitations on the population. Refugees fled to southeastern Nepal where seven camps were eventually established and which today house over 107,000 exiled Lhotshampas. (Eli 2008)

By the time the government began to show interest in managing the southern immigrant population, the lack of assimilation was notable. The king did not visit the south until 1957, when he realized that the Nepali immigrant population did not speak the national Dzongkha language, and the southern Nepali Hindu farmers essentially operated their own affairs (Evans 2013, 27). However, the Nationality Law of 1958 made everyone residing in Bhutan an official citizen (Evans 2013, 28). The brief period of equal representation, rights, and ability to live pluralistically ended with the new King Singye Dorji Wangchuck in 1972. He changed the laws to promote the Bhutanese culture; for example, in order to be a citizen one must speak Dzongkha and prove

residency before 1958. The "One Nation, One People's Policy" that dictated the dress code (among other restrictions) was a means to ban an outward expression of culture among the Lhotshampa.

Since people were only allowed to dress in a new approved dress code which required buying all new clothing, it was difficult for poor farmers to obey the law. The Bhutanization policies were oppressive and comparable to structural racism. Reports of the discrimination occurring so openly and relatively recently are just as worrisome as the fact that the Bhutanese government was systematically trying to create a homogeneous demographic. Since this group did not share a common language, religion, and culture, their political and national identities were called into question, and their rights as citizens were simply revoked. Reversal of such an important law was shocking and frightening, as it simply institutionalized and legislated legal discrimination.

When these bold attempts did not work to force the Lhotshampa people to assimilate, a report came out from the 1988 census that the government was aware of "large numbers of illegal immigrants flooding the country" (Bhutan). The new census essentially reclassified many Lhotshampas as non-nationals (Evans 2013, 28-29). The persecution of these "illegals" was more widely accepted and implemented then. They were "illegals" because they could not prove their residency with tax receipts before 1958. Officials knew that even if the family was resident prior to 1958, they would not have those records almost 30 years later (Ikram 2005, 107). Only the Lhotshampas were asked to produce such documents to verify their nationality. The southern Bhutanese effectively were stripped of their citizenship, or as author Michael Hutt put it in his book, they "unbecame" citizens (Hutt, 2003).

The discriminative policies that led to the exile of thousands possibly stemmed from more than just the fact that the Lhotshampa culture refused to assimilate to Bhutan, making them a possible threat to the traditional way of life in Bhutan. After centuries of theocratic or monarchic rule, the ethnic Nepalese citizens (among other factions) began campaigning for a democratic government. This possibly indicates that nationality was not entirely the issue and motive for the government. This unwelcome political competition created tension, making integration into Bhutanese life impossible at this point. More than 120,000 people were in duress and would end up spending decades trying to find a place to call home (Ikram 2005, 107).

These policies were a clear-cut way to reduce the legitimacy of those who could not comply and make it as difficult as possible for the group to continue living in Bhutan. Even if there was in fact a sudden spike of illegal immigration into Bhutan, what other country has ever legislated a new national dress code to easily identify those that they perceived not to belong? This was clearly a means of unjustified segregation. Being labeled as the "perceived other" is one of many examples of discrimination refugees face. Even though these families lived for generations within the same arbitrary lines that created the nation of Bhutan, they still somehow were not Bhutanese. In my studies of Humanities, I've come across many examples of a cultural identity not being limited to a specific geography or correlating with national boundaries; however, I have never seen firsthand the effects on a population until this trip to Nepal.

REFUGEE TO CITIZEN: SYSTEMATIC AND STRUCTURAL RACISM

Through a series of policies, legislative measures, and systematic segregations, Bhutan effectively forced all Lhotshampas out of the country by 1994. There are countless reports of abuses of human rights, torture, and terrorization to the Lhotshampa people. In Bhutan, "a powerful intimidation campaign ensured that Lhotshampas were forcibly evicted, many enduring rape, arbitrary arrest, torture and killings. First-hand accounts indicate that thousands of Lhotshampas were made to sign voluntary migration forms at gunpoint before receiving paltry compensation for their land and leaving the country" (Eli 2008).

While in the Beldangi refugee camp, I met a man who was imprisoned and tortured for eight years because he was a Nepali journalist reporting on the human rights violations occurring to his countrymen. According to him, he was sentenced to life and "only" had to endure eight years because he was being refused medicine for his heart condition. Human rights groups got involved; and were able to use the denial of necessary treatment for a life-threatening illness (a human rights violation) as a means to ultimately get him released. His story revealed that in addition to many thousands who were unjustly persecuted in violation of their international human rights, reporting of such atrocities was also suppressed to some degree. This type of totalitarian control of the press is unfortunately what limits the international community from learning about the transgressive acts in real time.

In April 2001, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported "107,571 refugees are living in eight camps[6] located in the Jhapa and Morang districts of eastern Nepal, while more than 20,000 refugees are living around the country (UNHCR

[6] The Beldangi refugee camp is actually divided into Beldangi I, II, and extension; however, most only count seven refugee camps in total.

2001)" (Kharat 2003, 285).[7] The 20,000 refugees that were internally displaced may not have received assistance from UNHCR during the early years of the crisis. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are much harder to serve since they are decentralized. Neither IDPs nor refugees that emerged from being forced to flee Bhutan for their safety had any support from the governments of Nepal or Bhutan until the international community stepped in.

THE NEEDS OF MANY

Even though the journalist and the roughly 120,000 Bhutanese refugees were never guaranteed safe passage, shelter, or food, they fled to Nepal from Bhutan for refuge. In 1990, Nepal established makeshift camps along the Mechi River, which flows north to south along the Indian border in the city of Assam. The police escorted the refugees out of the Indian Territory and into Nepal (Ikram 2005, 110). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees came in 1991 after a formal request from the Nepali government. This request included the coordination of all emergency relief, education, and other non-governmental organizations relieving Nepal from responsibility for caring for this vulnerable group. Many organizations came into Nepal, for what they believed to be short-term relief and aid (Hutt 2003, 257). These vital resources that aid countries in times of need around the world would end up serving the Nepali Bhutanese community for more than 24 years.

[7] "UNHCR works with three international and three national NGOs. On all refugee matters, UNHCR coordinates with the ministry of home affairs, through its refugee coordination unit in Jhapa. Other UN agencies such as UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO provide technical assistance to UNHCR in their respective areas of expertise. WFP provides basic food rations." (Kharat 288)

One of the main reasons the history of this exiled group of refugees is so unique is that they were not persecuted under a militant group or dictator, living during a time of war, or affected by a natural disaster. Their status was simply created by a king and not during a period of national crisis. The king of Bhutan proclaimed that the thousands who claimed to be Bhutanese in the refugee camps were in fact "fake," according to the 1985 Citizenship Act passed by Royal Bhutanese Government, and vowed to prevent their return. The law stipulates that if any Bhutanese citizen flees, leaves voluntarily, or is forced to leave, they will not ever be allowed to return (The Bhutan Citizenship Act, 3). Therefore, the king and the elite ruling class were confident in their denial of reintegration of the refugees; after all, it was the law of the land.

BILATERAL TALKS

After the mass exodus of Lhotshampas out of Bhutan, the refugees' futures were unclear as they settled into their temporary homes. In 1993, the first official bilateral talk between Nepal and Bhutan began with establishing a Joint Ministerial Committee to discuss the displaced population prospective. The decided-upon main initiatives were: determining categories to divide the refugees into, national positions on the aforementioned groups, and a mutually accepted agreement (Ikram 2005, 111). In May of that year, the bilateral team, composed of five members from each nation, finally came to an agreement about categories the refugees would be sorted into for resettlement purposes. The four groups were: "(1) Bonafide Bhutanese who have been forcibly evicted. (2) Bhutanese who have voluntarily emigrated. [They knew full well that anyone placed into this category would legally not be allowed to re-enter Bhutan because of the

1985 Citizens Act, so this category was almost pointless [8](3) Non-Bhutanese.[9] (4) Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts" (Ikram 2005, 111).

After years of stalemates and deadlocks by 2003, there was little progress made in the high-level talks, despite the Royal Government of Bhutan and Nepal having 15 rounds of negotiation meetings since 1993 to decide the fate of the thousands displaced (Quigley 2004, 187). Dividing them up into categories was supposed to simplify the problem and lead to a solution. However, it was determined that only 2.5% of the refugees were "Bonafide Bhutanese" since the others could not produce acceptable proof of identity (Quigley 2004, 190). This determination would alleviate Bhutan's responsibility for the thousands of homeless individuals who all came from Bhutan into another country. Repatriating only such a small portion allowed the Royal Government of Bhutan to say it was collaborating and allowing refugees to return. The option of re-applying for citizenship for the 70% who were determined to be in the second category was given to the refugees, but their land and properties had already been seized and given to northern Bhutanese to encourage them to move south into the now-unoccupied land.

In addition, the government did not address the accusation of countless human rights violations that the refugees were subjected to while in Bhutan. There was no formal decree that stated that if refugees were allowed to re-enter Bhutan, the discrimination would no longer be legal by changing the legislation that created the need to flee originally. No formal plan of repatriation or resettlement, or an exit strategy for

[8] A firmly established rule of international law is that no state may expel its own nationals. This includes the right to leave and return to one's own country at will.

[9] Bhutan to this day believes that the majority of the people who lived in refugee camps were never in fact Bhutanese or even necessarily the farmers who claimed to be exiled. Rather, they were people from India and Nepal who were essentially looking to take advantage of the fact that proper population control was not demonstrated in the early years of the camps' formation.

when the international non-governmental organizations could no longer support the camps, could be agreed upon 11 years after the mass emigration (Quigley 2004, 191). Even though this international crisis was one of the largest humanitarian efforts to date to find a home for the thousands who were forced into statelessness and geographically trapped among three nations that did not want to open their doors to them, the crisis had no end in sight.

Very little progress was achieved from the talks and what little was decided upon was hard to implement with the political instability of the Nepali government (Quigley 2004, 192). The bilateral talks were halted because of violence in 2003 when it was clear that only 2.5% (roughly 293 people) were going to be able to return (without compensation of any kind) to a still very discriminatory Bhutan. A meeting of officials from both nations was attacked by an angry mob and, although it is unclear what really happened (some reports indicate stones were thrown at them), the Bhutanese Foreign Ministry ceased all bilateral negotiations. The Bhutanese government believed the attack to be premeditated; the incident damaged the respective trust between the two nations (Quigley 2004, 194). Nepal believed the episode to be a Bhutanese stalling tactic. Well over a decade after the crisis, the Bhutanese government would still not show any real commitment to help those who were forced to emigrate.

Successful compromises from the talks were furthermore unlikely given the leadership of Bhutan. The Royal Government of Bhutan was controlled by a king who "described the majority of the refugee camp-dwellers as fake refugees with no prior links to Bhutan" (Quigley 2004, 195). Unfortunately for the inhabitants of Bhutan, there is no tolerance for disagreeing with the king. For centuries, the king has been regarded as the

equal of Lord Buddha; therefore any criticism, disagreement, or deviation from the king's word is considered not only treason but sacrilegious (Ikram 2005, 104). No Bhutanese citizen would have had even a platform to disagree with the uncivil policy pushing out their fellow countrymen and women.

BELDANGI REFUGEE CAMPS I and II

Armed with the history of how this group became refugees, the next step is to learn about the culture of the people who have arrived by the thousands in Cleveland. A colleague and I traveled to the most populated Bhutanese refugee camp in Nepal to meet those still living there. We arrived at the Beldangi refugee camp on April 15, 2015, the day after the Nepali 2072 New Year. It is about a twenty minute car ride from the UNHCR and IOM compound (which is highly secured) and yet the camp is completely open. There is no security gate, fence, or even boundaries to separate the camp from the rest of the Nepali jungle. We did not realize we even crossed into the camp because the surrounding area was so poor and destitute that it was not easily distinguished from the nearby village. The United Nations rents the land from the Kingdom of Nepal, and they have created a small bamboo village tucked neatly away inside a jungle in the Jhapa and Morang district. The IOM classrooms are made of cement but virtually everything else is bamboo and thatch. This bamboo village starkly contrasts with the life that the refugees will discover in Cleveland and across the United States. As in the rest of Nepal, there are no street signs, outdoor lighting, or any clear layout to discern how to navigate the camp. The huts have solar panel dishes that the people use for rice and pressure cookers, but short of that there is no electricity. This would explain why the resettlement agencies

have to review cooking safety and how to use kitchen electronics with all new arrivals. A glimpse at the impoverished lifestyle helped us understand the harsh realities that the refugees come to us from.

This refugee camp is relatively sprawled out compared to other more densely populated camps. IOM officials compared this camp to others in the Middle East and Africa to give a sense of how different the security and layout was. Every time a family is resettled, their hut is torn down and trees are replanted. Twenty years after using this method of reforestation and resettlement, the camp seem illogically laid out amid a forest. Comprehending what life would be like in a city with little green spaces would be hard to imagine for this population who was accustomed to living practically in nature. The lack of security is notable for a population that was once persecuted and still very vulnerable. There is no visible police or military presence, and after meeting with security we were told that things were calm in the camp and there was generally no need.

One of the least expected sights of the Beldangi camp was the outer road; there were 12 Western Unions and probably just as many liquor stores along it. After interviewing the IOM staff, we learned more about the problem of alcohol abuse among the Bhutanese refugees. The majority of refugees have already been resettled and wire money home to their families still in the camp so they do not have to work for practically nothing, like Diyali's father did. The liquor is priced so cheaply that it is more than accessible with these wired funds, and widely abused. A 2013 study done on the prevalence of hazardous/harmful consumption of alcohol showed a 22.6% rate among the adult male population. Even worse, the researchers fear that the number is under-reported since some refugees ferment their own alcohol (which is illegal and liable to be

fined), and others were afraid that honest reporting would hurt their chances of being resettled (Luitel et al. 2013, 352). Given that almost a quarter of the male population has an alcohol abuse problem, one would think it would be more widely discussed or controlled in the camps.

This is a perfect example of how learning about their plight will help us better serve the population in Cleveland. We sat and talked to the UNHCR staff about the resources for alcohol abuse in Cleveland and brainstormed on how to increase their participation in these services. This addiction can worsen when the added stressors of adjusting to a completely different culture and language are combined with a person already struggling with addiction. This population is dealing with many issues; alcohol abuse is just one of the many issues that will transcend borders and make successful resettlement more difficult.

DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATION

In addition to a troubling past of persecution and poverty, there is another obstacle the Bhutanese refugees face: quality education. The Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) has one school where all English as a second language students attend to learn English and cultural assimilation. Formerly, I worked there and learned a little about the Nepali students' success and struggles in an American classroom. In spite of Diyali's experience years ago in the school, this camp now struggles with providing a quality education to its students. Visiting the refugee camp's school was crucial for understanding where our students come from.

Nepal's school was out on its only break for the year, but we were fortunate enough to run into the principal and assistant principal while "trespassing" and taking photos of the high school. In Nepal, school is K-10th grade and taught with minimal resources. The principal explained the difficulties of teaching in a refugee camp. All the educated and qualified individuals leave first (teachers are refugees too). Students miss school for appointments often, and students lose interest because they too are leaving soon. There is no electricity, and little in the way of teaching materials or school supplies. School is only taught in a basic lecture format, which explains why some CMSD teaching models are difficult for them. There is literally no parent involvement (a problem the CMSD struggles with to engage new Nepali parents in their child's education) and rules are getting harder to enforce. The principal admitted that the school's ability to educate is declining as time goes on. Educational delays are another obstacle in successful assimilation into American society.

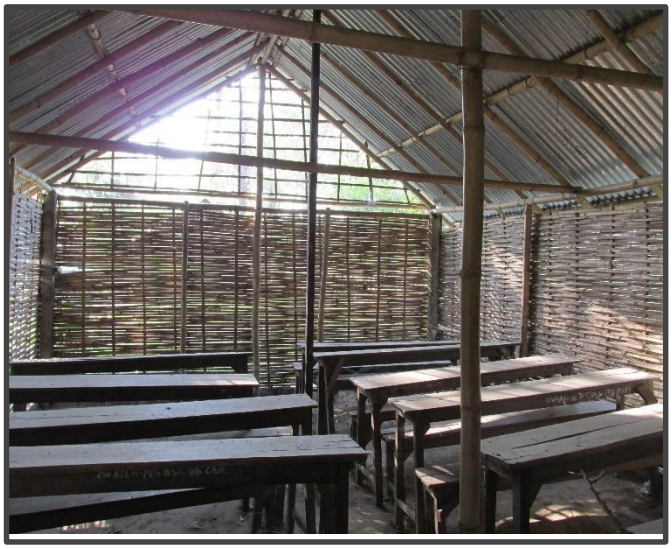

Figure 3 A high school classroom in Beldangi Camp 1

CULTURAL ORIENTATION

My colleague and I visited the Bhutanese refugees' camps as guests of the IOM to conduct research on cultural orientations and the initial process of resettlement. The goal

was to better understand what camp life was like and what the refugees were taught in cultural orientation before coming to the United States. The plan was to observe the classes and get access to the educational materials, so we could better fill in the blanks on our end. We were the first two to visit Nepal from the Refugee Services Collaborative (RSC) or any other Northeast Ohio agency. Learning how refugees were prepared and how we could better assist them upon arrival was long overdue on the RSC's part. Our research would help the schools gain insight into the education of children coming from Nepal and case managers working daily to serve this population.

Since Bhutan and Nepal are so dramatically different from the three main resettlement countries,[10] the IOM offers free classes for adults to prepare them for resettlement. The IOM office in Damak, Nepal, is responsible for providing the refugees with a cultural orientation before moving to America. The classes are provided for free to adults, and childcare is complimentary to encourage attendance. Classes are walking distance from the camp and taught mainly in Nepali to ensure comprehension. A lot of time was spent dispelling myths about living in America. Thousands have already relocated to the United States and send home conflicting stories or reports of having been through extreme situations[11] in their short time in America. The class focuses on dispelling stereotypes, since they fear the unknown about their new lives.

Sitting in a five-day class on what it is like to be an American, taught to people who have lived a very different life in seclusion from the modern world, helped me understand the differences between our two cultures. The class seemed both fascinated

[10] In total there are eight third-country resettlement countries that accept Bhutanese refugees. The top three are Australia, Canada, and the United States; Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom have all accepted refugees over the last decade.

[11] There exists a broad spectrum of fears and worst-case scenarios that the population has encountered since resettling in America.

and worried about everything that would soon be their new life. The first day of classes is "Who is an American" and general knowledge and overviews of America's population, history, and geography. There is not much diversity in Southeast Asia, and explaining the heterogeneity of Americans is a lesson in itself to a group that has been not exposed to many cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities (Ranard 2012, 18-23). Also, the irony of moving to a land where heterogeneity is embraced, given Bhutan's reaction to just one other pluralistic culture, will be evident when they arrive and discover they can maintain most of their existing culture.

The second day of preparation covers the rights and responsibilities of being an American. This class, in particular, helped us gain insight on the difference in the legal system between the two nations. They cover landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities; most of the refugees have never rented or owned their own home (Ranard 2012, 61-62). A really interesting aspect is the rights and responsibilities of becoming a U.S. citizen. The immigration laws and restrictions are explained for each step of the process of naturalizing, so they know what to expect. The rights of becoming a citizen are especially favored in discussion (Ranard 2012, 152-54), most likely because they have never been entitled to it before; that is likely why they have so many questions. Day three of class is dedicated to employment and expectations of work ethic, hours, and employment realities of working in America. Many are displeased when it becomes clear they are going to need to work two part-time jobs, or their wives or older children would have to work. We did household budgets with the refugees to demonstrate the high cost of living in America (Ranard 2012, 162-181).

The American work structure will unfortunately break apart the traditional Bhutanese family dynamic. Thinking back to Diyali's father's wages working outside the refugee camps, hearing about minimum wage in America would appear to be sufficient without knowing the high- cost of living. No one in that classroom has been employed legally, full-time or year round, for over twenty years- if they had any working experience at all. We role-played and did mock interviews, but realistically, becoming gainfully employed and doing well financially will be a struggle for each and every one of them as they assimilate.

On day four of sitting Indian-style in a circle during cultural orientation, the instructor reviews education and healthcare systems in America. The refugees are flabbergasted at how much time and money Americans spend on education (Ranard 2012, 92-104). Most have only ever been exposed to the education offered in the camps. Healthcare access is a big topic of discussion in the classroom, because after eight years of resettlement out of the camp, many who were still left in the camps had been waiting for medical clearance to travel or to accompany elderly or sick relatives. Refugees qualify for Medicaid initially and can reapply after nine months, so they will receive medical care for free for a short period of time.

For many, this is good reason enough to look forward to coming to America; healthcare in the camp is limited and accompanied by very long wait times. An opportunity for quality education is another major reason people are interested in resettlement. The different paths of education (vocational, two and four year models, higher education) are laid out physically on the floor as a pathway to success, to illustrate how much time and energy Americans spend on schooling (Ranard 2012, 200). Very few

have had any kind of higher education, and if they did, it will most likely not transfer to America. This is a common problem the Refugee Services Collaborative runs into; some people will be resettled with a degree from another country, but it is not recognized or accredited in the United States. Refugees who were once respected in their communities for their education and professional career will be forced to take a low-level job while they learn English and learn about reaccreditation.

Day five is a hodge-podge lesson of travel, transportation, and cultural adjustment once in the United States (International Organization for Migration 2010). In order to understand the difficulties that this monumental shift in realities is to the Bhutanese refugees, one must understand how almost every aspect of their life will be flipped upside down in the roughly 25-30 hours it takes to get from Damak, Nepal, to their new home in the United States. The Bhutanese refugees in Cleveland have had to adapt the best they can to a lifestyle that requires ten day orientations that still cannot possibly cover a small fraction of all the differences between the two cultures. This is why it was so important to go to the camp and see what is being taught and how we can better help fill in the blanks and prepare them when they arrive.

PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

With a better understanding of the history of why our new neighbors became refugees, and by participating in their cultural orientation classes, I began interviews much like the one with Ganga Diyali to learn the aspects the history books could not teach me. While visiting the Beldangi refugee camp, I was able to interview staff members of the IOM and UNHCR, and refugees themselves, to learn more about the

process of resettlement through the individuals who live it every day. This unique access to perspectives from both sides of the process allowed for a holistic view of the beginning of the resettlement process. I work with resettlement agencies and the Refugee Services Collaborative in Cleveland, but knew little of the initial steps of the process. Well aware that it will take years before a refugee is processed completely and ready for third country resettlement, I was curious to learn about average wait times and those still waiting.

I presumed that the slow process was the bureaucracy's fault. In the case of the Bhutanese refugees, who began resettling in third countries in 2007, those who left first waited 16 years and those who are still in the camp when I visited in 2015 had been waiting 24 years. No amount of excuses for an agency or organization involved in the process could be blamed for that slow of a wait time. The unknown to me was that thousands of the refugees living in the camp did *not want* to be resettled. They only wanted to return to Bhutan with citizenship or be allowed to reintegrate into Nepali society. They were uninterested in moving to a faraway land with a completely different culture and language than what they were accustomed too. This shocking truth was revealed while interviewing staff in the camps; no one at RSC ever mentioned the refugees' reluctance as a factor in wait times.

The UNHCR and IOM cannot force individuals to resettle even if there is no other political solution. Thousands simply did not sign up for resettlement, or delayed the inevitable by intentionally stalling the process. Many refugees were older or very traditional (discussed further with the vignette of Laxmi Maya), did not want to live anywhere else, and wanted to wait until an in-country solution was found. After the almost 15 years of fruitless talks and many more years living in a refugee camp, some

still hold onto hope of being able to return to Bhutan. To this day, though, there are still around 4,000 refugees in the camp who have not signed resettlement contracts in spite of 2014 being the proposed cut-off year to sign up. When I asked the director of operations of the IOM in Damak what will happen to those who have not agreed to be resettled, she did not have an answer. No one seems to know for sure what will happen to the people who stay behind. The United Nations has said that it will be pulling out all Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) support in the area soon to take resources to other populations. The truth of the matter is that they have been there providing assistance for over 20 years now and cannot stay forever.

The interviews I conducted while in the camp helped paint a picture of life there: many were perpetually waiting for a foreign agency to decide their destiny. The following are short interviews I conducted in the Beldangi II refugee camp to gain insight of what I had not already learned through researching the history of their plight. The final piece is to gain as much as possible of the human experience to fully understand and to better welcome and help this population when they arrive in Cleveland.

Tilak Biswa is 23 years old. I met him doing what he has been doing for the majority of his life—waiting. He was sitting outside of cultural orientation class when I asked if I could ask a few questions, since I noticed his English was quite stronger than the other students'. When I asked what he thought of the fact that he has spent his whole life waiting to be resettled, he stopped me and said that "now is so much better." It was seven years before the IOM finished setting up the camp; before then, there was no established presence of aid or permanent structures. This echoed what I previously learned about the creation of the camp and how the international NGOs had to come to

his people's aid since Bhutan, India, and Nepal were not going to. He grew up in the camp and had never been outside its small boundaries, not familiar with life in Bhutan or any other part of Nepal. He was anxious about the resettlement this close to the day that he was about to leave everything he had known behind.

Biswa and his family were being sent to Dallas, Texas, soon to be rejoined with his parents. His wife and three children were excited to be able to reunite; they originally had to stay behind because he was having medical problems for years. Family units are not separated, so his wife and children had to stay behind too when their extended family was resettled. Much of the reason Cleveland's local resettled refugee population is mainly Bhutanese is because of family reunification. People are sent to live with relatives who serve as anchors of support for the newly arrived. Biswa was excited to hear that I was from Ohio because he had friends in Columbus and wanted to move there shortly after arriving. He laughed when I told him Texas weather is much more comparable to Nepal, and he would be more comfortable there. He said he wants to feel the cold, even though he knows heat well. Drastically different weather is among one of countless changes they will soon encounter. The Bhutanese refugees in Cleveland are often overdressed by Ohio standards for the weather because they are not used to the cold winters.

Biswa and his wife asked about Lakewood, the well-established Nepali community that has apparently excited people leaving Nepal and heading to America. When I told him that I came to Nepal because of the Bhutanese communities like Lakewood near my city, he quickly added he would come to visit. In Lakewood there are Nepali groceries, restaurants, and shops that help refugees feel more at home in a city as

completely different as Cleveland. His biggest worry, most likely from the class we were just in about the realities of the working class in America, was whether or not he could get a job in Ohio. This was a hard question to answer honestly. He had no education (school is not mandatory and the aforementioned reasons make education here more difficult) and had never worked a day in his life. From working with the RSC, I know how hard it is to get employers to give a chance to someone like Biswa.

Another student I interviewed outside of the cultural orientation was Ganga Basnet, whose worn face made him look much older than his actual age of 24. His voice was harsh and sounded painful when he spoke, as if he had throat cancer from years of smoking. He told me that he had been in the camp since he was four years old, when his family fled from Bhutan. Basnet was supposed to be resettled five years ago but said it was delayed due to complications. He said that ten years ago, the camp was filled with many people and was a different kind of place. The refugees still in the camp must find it difficult to watch everyone around them leave, knowing that more than 70% of the population got to get out before they did. Basnet told me he was an English teacher in the camp's school and a psychologist, which is what he really wants to be when he is older. You can do both in a refugee camp as an assistant without a degree. The conversation made me think of a child telling me what big dreams they had for when they grew up, only in this case it was when he *got out*.

Basnet and his family were being sent to Columbus, so the onslaught of Ohio questions ensued. He told me stories about how well his family was doing there, one in a factory job and another in a small shop. They knew he was coming and were supposed to help him get a job in the factory. It was clear that both Basnet and Biswa were most

worried about finding work and being able to provide for their families in Ohio. To my surprise, Basnet walked up to the map on the wall and pointed directly to Columbus and had me show him where Cleveland was in comparison. He asked my colleague and me to explain what the resettlement agency does and what resources would be available to help him navigate his new home. Even though he was educated and spoke English decently, his anxieties about resettlement were apparent.

FINAL GOODBYES

At 5:00 AM we went back to the refugee camp one final time to see an airport pick-up, a weekly event in the camp to send off a busload of refugees to Kathmandu. The charter buses and a crowd of more than a hundred people were already there when we arrived. All their duffle bags are lined up with their final destinations written out neatly on the outside. The IOM gives them a duffle bag to fit all their worldly possessions into (not to exceed 55 lbs.), knowing that most will never make it back to Nepal again. Children were crying and only seemed to understand that it is a sad occasion, rather than the extent of what was about to happen. Those leaving were all dressed up, wearing most likely their only formal outfit and donning multiple thin pale yellow

Figure 4 Young girl leaving Beldangi I Camp

scarves for luck, and Tikka[12] thick enough that it looked like everyone they ever knew blessed them for their long journey. Everyone leaving slowly boarded the bus and smiled reassuringly, but simultaneously teared up a little. Most will never return and have spent the majority of their lives in the camp. They were on their way to their new home, a place with differences they could not yet comprehend.

PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION

The purpose for our trip was to learn more about the culture and how the IOM prepares refugees for their new life in America. While in Nepal, we went to the IOM Transit Center in Kathmandu to sit in on the final classes before the refugees leave to resettle to their third country in search of a new life. The Transit Center was set up like a compound that included security high walls with guards, cement construction of classrooms, and barrack-style dormitories with 50 bunk beds in an open format. There is one doctor and two nurses who perform the final medical evaluations for everyone who comes through. The medical screening is done beforehand in the camps, and they are issued an eight week's supply of any medications they might be on. From interviewing the doctor, we learned that the most common issue he sees patients for is detoxing during the final five days, which are secluded with no access to alcohol. The doctor explained the horribly high prevalence of alcohol dependence, especially in adult males within the Bhutanese population. If they become unwell from detoxification or any other illness, their whole family's travel will be delayed.

[12] Tilaka or tikka is a Hindu traditional blessing placed on the forehead between the crown of the nose and the hairline. It can be made of red powder mixed with yogurt and rice grain. Anyone is able to give you a blessing, not just a man of faith.

The doctor and my travel companion spoke frankly about the issue of alcohol abuse in the camp. The doctor pointed out that it is not uncommon for alcohol abuse to be an issue in refugee camps as individuals deal with depression, stress and anxiety, and boredom. Just as anywhere else in the world, alcohol is used as a coping mechanism and a way to self-medicate. That is why the refugees are no longer able to have unmonitored visitors[13] or leave the compound in their remaining five days. This is a major problem within the Bhutanese community that transcends borders. We told the doctor that the RSC recently completed a mental health study that was prompted in large part by incidents within the resettled Bhutanese community in Cleveland. This is another example of what we are trying to improve to become more welcoming to this community.

The Pre-Departure Orientation was designed to focus heavily on the travel portion but also other key need-to-know logistics about their new homes. The class instructor did a good job recapping what was already taught their cultural orientation before coming there; sometimes there is a long gap between the two cultural sessions, and it is a lot of new material to absorb. The classroom was set up like a mock airport to discuss the trip

Figure 5 Pre-Departure Orientation in Kathmandu

[13] All guests, which are few this far into the resettlement process, go through a process of visitation similar to an American prison; there are set hours, pat downs, and nothing in or out while being monitored during the whole visit.

and travelling in general. This is the first time they would be traveling such a distance,[14] and there are a lot of logistics to cover to explain an international flight with multiple layovers when most do not speak English. The IOM staff will take them from the Transit Center to the Kathmandu's International Airport.[15] Then they are responsible for getting through their layovers and connections alone, all the way to baggage claim at their final destination where their resettlement agency will pick them up. In the classroom's mock airport, the instructor taught them how to find their seats and how to use a seatbelt. I always thought it was ridiculous that flight attendants still show you how to use a seatbelt on the plane, but I never took this scenario into consideration. The class reviewed plane etiquette, how to use the bathroom (this is a lengthy topic of conversation because this will be the first time most use a western-style toilet, as opposed to what Americans call a "squatty-potty"), proper personal hygiene, airplane food, what to do if your child starts misbehaving or crying, and what to do during a layover (International 2010, 12), all of which are routine activities for Americans but were new concepts to the Bhutanese refugees and required in-depth explanations.

This was my first day in an IOM refugee class and I had not anticipated some of the questions we were asked about life in America. Mainly, a lot of questions about what their new cities were like (quite a few were heading to Pennsylvania, New York, Texas, or Ohio), everything from the weather to bus systems and job opportunities. I especially did not expect some of the questions about race. They were used to the caste system,

[14] All the Bhutanese refugees that were in this class had just flown there from Bhadrapur Airport (about an hour bus ride from the refugee camp) to Kathmandu's Tribhuvan, which is a national charter flight with all the IOM staff.

[15] This is not like most of the world's international airports. It is essentially a building (sometimes with running and clean drinking water but no other amenities available) next to an airstrip that is understaffed, literally falling apart and incapable of the bandwidth needed to meet the demands of volume or international standards. I spent 22 hours in this airport after the earthquake and could write pages on the inadequacies and complete failure during a time of crisis.

where some castes still do not normally interact with each other, and there are not many foreigners except for the international staff of the IOM or UNHCR. This was mentioned in the dormitories because issues have arisen over having different castes sleep in the same room or next to one another. My colleague pointed out that these issues carry over to the United States, and many are uncomfortable around other races and are not used to sharing classrooms or other social settings. On top of learning English and a new culture, their concepts of race and class will also have to evolve to fit into American society.

One additional topic had to be addressed in these final classes: cultural norms and laws around sexism and sexual harassment. Each country has its own expectations and allowances, and there was quite a long discussion on what is and is not illegal in the United States. For example, inappropriate touching and personal space was covered, as were other cultural norms such as polygamy. When asked, each group thought polygamy[16] was perfectly acceptable; however, the groups did not even want to discuss other things it deemed too unacceptable, such as teen kissing (International 2010, 80). Next, the instructor educated them on the laws regarding domestic violence, another foreign concept that they needed to get clear before arriving in America, where their cultural differences could get them in trouble with American law quickly (International 2010, 78). This was the last topic covered on the last day before their travel to the United States of America.

[16] Polygamy is accepted and common in Nepal. However, since it is not well-accepted in the United States, only the first marriage is considered valid. When a man has two wives and children with each, he will only be guaranteed relocation with the first one. The other can later apply to be reunified, but only as an anchor for support and not as family.

THE REFUGEE SERVICES COLLABORATIVE

This long labor-intensive process of refugee resettlement is not new internationally or in Cleveland. Refugee resettlement in the United States began in 1948, when the U.S. Congress passed the first refugee legislation welcoming the arrival of 250,000 externally displaced Europeans; only then did the United States officially take a humanitarian and political stance on the issue. Next, in the 1950s-60s, the United States resettled hundreds of thousands from Communist regimes, and in the 1970s Indochinese refugees from war-torn countries. In 2014, the United States accepted 70,000 refugees from around the globe. The number of resettled refugees took a dramatic decrease after 9/11/2001 and hit an all-time low of 27,110 resettled annually ("History"). Given that there are more refugees in the world now than ever, and the majority are stranded in underdeveloped countries (such as Nepal), America should strive to be more welcoming, along with other nations that have the infrastructure, stable economies, and governments to help refugees resettle and escape their current plight. In order to begin to do so, we must first learn about the 59.5 million refugees who desperately need our help, and collectively work to aid them in their time of need.

While in Nepal at the IOM/UNHCR compound, my colleague and I presented a report to the staff on how the refugees were doing in Cleveland. We provided the staff with a thorough account of successes and struggles of that community in our city. One thing my travel companion and I boasted about was that Cleveland has something unique to offer refugees that other cities do not have. I am lucky to get to be a part of the Refugee Services Collaborative that meets monthly. The RSC is a collaborative of 14 non-profit organizations who all work to help refugees through a variety of specialties

and services. The Collaborative has the refugee resettlement agencies US Together, Catholic Charities, and International Services Center (ISC). These agencies' sole purpose is to provide initial services, such as pre-arrival arrangements for housing, and also case management for employment, all medical needs, school enrollment, English as a second language classes, cultural orientations, and year-round activities for community engagement. In addition to the resettlement agencies, other organizations offer housing services, advocacy and legal aid, financial assistance, and religious and educational services to the new Clevelanders. The group has joint events and quarterly output meetings where they engage the community stakeholders to increase public awareness about refugees living in Cleveland. The RSC is only four years old but is already working to strengthen the Cleveland system by collaboration, and is able to better serve the refugee population.

This group jointly applied for funding from the Cleveland Foundation to pay for an independent economic impact study to find out the financial situation of refugees. The Chmura Economics & Analytics' *Economic Impact of Refugees in the Cleveland Area, Calendar Year 2012*, outlined the willingness to work for the refugees in our community. According to the findings of the study, refugees typically find employment within five months of arriving in Cleveland; in the last ten years, 38 businesses were started by refugees. The study is 44 pages long and ultimately concludes that the refugees in Cleveland bring a ten-to-one return on investment; that means that in 2012 the RSC spent 4.8 million dollars in services, and in return they contributed 48 million dollars to the local economy. Those that I interviewed in Nepal who were worried about employment did want to come to Lakewood because they knew their fellow refugees were doing well

here. Some of these contributions to the Cleveland economy came as a result of resettling the very same community that I visited in camps that worried that they would not find work.

Refugees initially have a great number of needs, but overall become contributing members of societies very quickly. Studies like these are important in the Collaborative's ability to convey the importance of supporting refugees getting here, and gaining support for them once they are resettled in our city. Based on what I learned, it is an uphill battle for refugees; their plight does not go away and life does not become instantly better for them once they arrive. Of course, since I am a westerner who is accustomed to this life, I see the emigration from Nepal to a first world nation as an instant improvement. The truth is that it is just a step in a very long process of recovery from years of alienation and discrimination to becoming a part of a society again. For many of them, they will be living in an apartment or house, working consistently, and having access to healthcare and education for the first time in their lives. The list of what refugees have to become accustomed to is far too long to list here. That is why it is so essential that Americans take the time to acquaint themselves with their plight, in order to better understand the difficult transition they endure.

A LIFETIME OF STRUGGLES

A classic example of the Bhutanese refugee plight (being forced to flee, camp life, and finally resettlement) is the life story of a woman I met in the cultural orientation

class. Laxmi Maya was elderly and frail and moved slowly; perhaps it was because she was wrapped tightly in a traditional sari that constricts freedom of movement. When asked to read, all she could do was hold the book smiling while her daughter in-law read it for her. I sat next to her and asked if I could learn a little about her. Her son translated and soon I found out that she was on her way to

Figure 6 Laxmi Maya at Cultural Orientation class

Texas because her family finally convinced her to resettle. She was one of the tough old birds who had been trying to stick it out and wait for a way to live in Nepal or Bhutan. Laxmi Maya and her husband finally agreed to give her son and daughter-in law and their young children a chance for a better life in America. They used to be rice farmers, just like many of the Lhotshampa years ago. When I met here, she sat in a class (her first classroom) and listened to all the differences she would have to get used to when she moved to Texas.

This woman had been through truly hard times in her life. She gave off a calming effect and a sense that anything was manageable when there was no other choice. This was just one more chapter and one more thing that was not going to come easily, as I suspect nothing in her life ever did. When I asked how old she was, she whispered into

my ear (even though I do not speak Nepali), "*only* 80 years old!" Imagine the difficulties at age 80, not being able to read and write in her own language yet expected to learn and thrive in English. Laxmi Maya is just one of the many thousands of elderly who will understandably struggle with third country resettlement. Without knowing what she had been through on her journey to her new home, how could we expect to help and welcome her?

CONCLUSION

While studying humanities, I learned the importance of understanding foreign cultures and international history. Most people ask what I plan on doing with a Master's degree in Humanities; I too had questioned it, until this trip. While in the UNHCR/IOM compound outside of the refugee camp, I met wonderful people who have made careers advocating and serving the world's most vulnerable populations. They have seen human suffering on a level most of us cannot even imagine. I told them about my concern and desire to have a meaningful career, and my greatest fear of studying the past when the future is unfolding rapidly around us. The director of operations, Paul Norton, gave me wonderful insight. Norton said he has seen most of the world, humankind at their worst, Mother Nature at its cruelest, and militias destroying nations. The one thing people do not seem to realize is that none of it is new. Studying the past is the best way to stay relevant, because one can understand the dynamics more thoroughly by truly seeing a bigger picture. We might have more refugees in the world right now than ever before, but none of their struggles are new. The discrimination, human rights violations, and ethnic cleansing that are all horrible components of history of the Bhutanese refugees are sadly not new atrocities, nor going away anytime soon. We have to embrace and help those

who have the least. That is why it is so important that we welcome the growing Bhutanese community in Cleveland. That starts by learning about their plight.

This research trip was a perfect praxis for my Master's in Humanities. Through courses on history, art, and literature, I have studied cultures around the world. After years of theory, this was a practical test of whether or not I understood humanity on so many levels. What does real fear of persecution of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion look like when it forces one to flee their country? How does it feel to be stateless when time after time history has shown nationality and statehood's inflexibility can be a manmade disaster? The struggles Nepal currently faces repeat and replicate years of the history of all nations. This once-isolated Himalayan country that time had forgotten was quickly faced with roughly 120,000 additional souls when it was struggling to care for basic needs of its current population. Refugees are a byproduct of the national struggles and political instability in Nepal.

This brief overview of the crisis and the way of life in the camps cannot summarize the plight of Bhutanese refugees. However, my trip to Nepal, the refugee camps, and this ancient culture taught me more than I expected about the Nepali Bhutanese community. Just as I had culture shock from a westerner's perspective, they too will struggle on a much greater scale with the navigation of a completely different culture. Without knowing the painful history of the refugees, we are more likely to judge and dismiss their struggles. People who make comments like "learn English or get out" do not have a clue about what paramount changes they are trying to adjust to while being depressed from missing the only life they ever knew. Being separated from their culture and country and trying to work in a foreign country while simultaneously learning

another language is unbelievably stressful and challenging. The more we know about the journey these individuals have undertaken, the more likely we will see how easily we can help. Simple things can be done to accommodate and help refugees while they acclimate. The more we learn, assist, and grow with refugees, the more welcoming our cities will become.

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